

## Nutri-Score: Harmonized and mandatory front-of-pack nutrition label urgently needed at the European Union level and beyond

**Lyon, France, 1 September 2021** – The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) has released a new IARC Evidence Summary Brief, titled “The Nutri-Score: A Science-Based Front-of-Pack Nutrition Label”. This report, led by scientists from IARC and partners, shows that the Nutri-Score, a clear and simple front-of-pack nutrition label that rates the nutritional quality of food products, is an effective tool to guide consumers towards healthier food choices. Based on scientific evidence, the IARC Evidence Summary Brief stresses the superiority of the Nutri-Score to other nutrition labels, and calls for its widespread and systematic adoption in Europe and beyond, to help consumers lower their risk of noncommunicable diseases such as cancer.

“The reduced mortality and cancer risk related to elevated consumption of foods with favourable Nutri-Score ratings has been scientifically established, and it is critical to step up its use in Europe and beyond,” says Dr Mathilde Touvier, principal investigator of this project and Head of the Nutritional Epidemiology Research Team at the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm)\*. “The Nutri-Score has an important role to play, not only to help consumers make informed choices about the nutritional quality of their diet but also to incentivize food manufacturers to improve the nutritional quality of their products and to help governments implement efficient strategies to prevent cancer and other nutrition-related diseases.”

The Nutri-Score rates the nutritional quality of food using different colours to classify products into five categories: from category A (dark green), with the highest nutritional quality, to category E (dark orange), with the lowest nutritional quality. The Nutri-Score is based on the British Food Standards Agency nutrient profiling system (modified version) (FSAm-NPS), adapted for the purpose of labelling. It has been promoted as a candidate to enable uniform food labelling systems across the European Union.

Epidemiological analyses in large-scale prospective cohorts in the diverse European population have shown that people who consume more foods with higher FSAm-NPS scores (corresponding to less-favourable Nutri-Score ratings and lower nutritional quality) have a higher risk of cancer, as well as a higher risk of overall mortality, and more specifically of mortality due to cancers and diseases of the circulatory, respiratory, and digestive systems.

Given its scientific evidence base, the Nutri-Score has already been adopted by several European countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland) and has been central to the European Commission discussions for several months.

In May 2020, the European Commission announced, as part of its Farm to Fork Strategy, that a harmonized and mandatory front-of-pack nutrition label would be adopted for Europe by the end of 2022.

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However, according to the European Union labelling regulations, displaying the Nutri-Score label on food products remains optional and relies on voluntary uptake by food manufacturers.

“There is clear scientific evidence on the relevance of this labelling system and its potential public health impact at the international level,” says IARC scientist Dr Inge Huybrechts, the co-principal investigator of the project. “While its adoption by several European Union countries is welcome, a mandatory use of this front-of-pack nutrition label is urgently needed, to help consumers and to make a real difference.”

### Note to the Editor

Well-established evidence exists on the impact of nutrition on the risks of cancer and cardiometabolic diseases, and increasing evidence supports a substantial impact of nutrition on respiratory health, through several pathways involving oxidative stress, inflammation, epigenetics, and the gut microbiome. Notably, dietary fibres (which are involved in anti-inflammatory responses) and fruits and vegetables (which are sources of anti-oxidants), as part of a healthy diet, have been shown to play a beneficial role in the prevention of several chronic noncommunicable diseases, whereas food components such as saturated fats, salt, sugar and sugar-sweetened beverages, and red or processed meat (which are involved in pro-inflammatory or pro-oxidant responses and insulin resistance) have detrimental effects on health.

This IARC Evidence Summary Brief is the second in a series of scientific Evidence Summary Briefs published by IARC to call attention to the findings of evidence-based studies in key aspects of cancer prevention.

\* The Nutritional Epidemiology Research Team (EREN-CRESS) is a collaboration of the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm), the French National Research Institute for Agriculture, Food and Environment (INRAE), the French Conservatoire national des arts et métiers (Cnam), Université Sorbonne Paris Nord, and Université de Paris.

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